

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #1370/01 1910748
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 090748Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0801
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4505
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 8831
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4633
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 2752
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUALSFJ/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA
RUACAAA/COMUSKOREA INTEL SEOUL KOR
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA SCJS SEOUL KOR
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OSD/ISA/EAP//

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001370

SIPDIS

PASS USTR FOR CUTLER, TRICK AND YOO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/10/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: GNP, DP ELECT NEW LEADERSHIP, NA SET TO OPEN

Classified By: POL Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: In early July both the ruling Grand National Party (GNP) and the main opposition party, the newly renamed Democratic Party (DP), selected their party leadership in a move that should end the stalemate over convening the National Assembly. The election of Park Hee-tae to lead the GNP is likely to precipitate the incorporation of Park Geun-hye's supporters currently outside the GNP. Veteran lawmaker Chung Sye-kyun's election as DP party chief and the consolidation of leadership within the party is expected to resolve some of the DP's factional divide. Ending the boycott, likely to happen by July 10, was facilitated by Lee Hoi-chang's Liberty Forward Party, giving the GNP and the DP a face-saving way out of their stand-off. Nevertheless, challenges abound as both parties struggle to consolidate their parties, overcome factional divides, and agree on committee chairs. End Summary.

GNP: Lee Faction Dominates, Park Faction Appeased

12. (SBU) The ruling GNP elected former Vice Assembly Speaker Park Hee-tae to serve a two-year term as party chair. The election, which took place on July 3 at the GNP National Convention, included both a vote by party members (weighted as 70 percent of the final decision) and national polling (30 percent). After Park was elected chairman, the remaining candidates, including Chung Mong-joon and Huh Tae-yeol, were appointed to the GNP's Supreme Council.

13. (SBU) Chairman Park is a strong supporter of President Lee Myung-bak and, though he is not a current member of the National Assembly, has played an important role in President Lee's Administration. His election as party chair, therefore, should signify a strengthening of ties between the GNP and the Blue House. This is good news for President Lee, who lost control of the party due to a factional fissure and the demise of his confidant and power broker Lee Jae-o in the April National Assembly elections.

14. (SBU) Of particular difficulty for the GNP has been disagreement over the fate of Park Geun-hye supporters, who split from the GNP and ran for the National Assembly as independents or as part of the Pro-Park Alliance (PPA). Park Hee-tae has called for more unity within the party, saying, "We cannot waste more time. All of them must rejoin the

party as soon as possible." On July 8 party leaders agreed in principle that all the so-called "defectors" will be allowed to rejoin the party, but they differed over the timing of some of the more controversial figures. After these 25 Park Geun-hye supporters -- 13 from the PPA and 12 independents -- are incorporated into the GNP, the ruling party will occupy 178 out of 299 seats.

DP: Rehabilitation of the "386'ers"?

15. (SBU) The opposition party held its national convention on July 6. At the convention, former chairman of the now defunct Uri Party, Chng Sye-kyun, was elected party chairman. The party also changed its name from the United Democratic Party (UDP) to the Democratic Party (DP). Changes within the party were more substantive; a new collective leadership system was announced, granting leadership to a single party chairman. When the UDP was created, joining the United New Democratic Party with the old Democratic Party, leadership was shared by a representative from each party. The party hopes the move to a single chairman will unify the factionalized party. The Supreme Council was also given anointed the official decision-making organ of the party.

16. (SBU) The election process included both a party vote and national polling, similar to the GNP. The DP however, held a separate election for supreme council members. Members now include one of former President Roh Moo Hyun's closest supporters, Ahn Hee Jung. Ahn's election came as a surprise, because in past elections the DP has followed a trend of eliminating former government members from party leadership. In addition to Ahn, the "386ers" -- recently maligned because of their affiliation with President Roh -- surprisingly got two other spots on the council: Kim Min-seok and Song Young-gil.

17. (SBU) Chung Sye-kyun, who is also a former member of Roh's administration, is considered to be more centrist than the Roh faction or his main rival for the top spot, Choo Mi-ae. His neutral stance on party factions gives party members hope of greater unification. The DP has given him the directive of demanding renegotiation of the beef agreement and settling oil prices.

National Assembly (Finally) to Convene

18. (SBU) On July 8 lawmakers from the ruling and opposition parties agreed to reopen the National Assembly within the week after agreeing to revise the country's livestock epidemic prevention act. The DP had demanded a renegotiation of the U.S. beef import pact and had maintained that the livestock epidemic prevention act be revised to impose limits on what beef parts can be imported, gain authority to regulate foreign meat packers and impose an automatic import ban if a country that exports beef to South Korea confirms a mad cow case. The GNP, however, remained insistent that renegotiations with the U.S. are impossible and that two additional rounds of talks ensured that national interest and public concerns have generally been satisfied. A compromise brokered by the Liberty Forward Party, a minor conservative party, calls for both public concerns and the national interest to be reflected in any revised livestock act, although the GNP held firm that no changes would be made that would violate international trade rules or cause trade frictions. Both the GNP and DP agreed in principle to find middle ground on the act once the National Assembly is reopened, now expected to happen on July 10.

Comment

19. (C) As the National Assembly struggles to return to order, loss of public support for both the GNP and DP over

internal bickering will continue to plague party leadership. The election of a more moderate leader for the DP may be a signal that the opposition is ready to cooperate, although the party remains deeply divided. The GNP, meanwhile, will need to balance the policies of its unpopular president with public and DP demands. Regardless, the selection of party leaders should provide a remedy to the power vacuum that had made negotiations between the parties so difficult. Still, they will find their new roles -- GNP as ruling party and DP as opposition -- take some getting used to.

VERSHBOW